

I oppose loosening the rules designed to promote and protect diversity of media ownership. These rules were adopted to ensure that the public would receive a diverse range of viewpoints from the media, and not simply the opinions of a handful of media conglomerates.

Diversity of opinions and information is a critical underpinning of any democratic society. Simply put, the development of an oligopolistic media would stifle the marketplace of ideas that has enabled this country to flourish since its founding. Although it could be argued that competition in the marketplace exists based simply on the number of players, there would be no competition if these players all advanced similar views and agendas.

It could be argued that media in the US is already too consolidated. Certainly, it appears that the quality of local, national and international reporting has diminished. Certainly, network news coverage is at an all-time low, and many so-called "news" shows are merely a form of "infotainment." Consolidation has led to a focus on the lowest common denominator, to the detriment of quality programming.

Written journalism has also begun to fail. Compare any issue of The Economist with similarly-focused American publications (Time, Newsweek, US News & World Reports). The depth and insights in The Economist far exceed those of its American counterparts. Does it not seem odd that Americans need to rely upon an English publication for insights and analysis?

Newspaper journalism is also failing. USA Today is considered "journalism" by many, even though McPaper might be a better descriptions. When was the last time USA Today had an article of major import? It can't be argued with a straight face that USA Today functions as a valued part of the so-called "Fourth Estate."

I have heard it argued that common media ownership provides incentives to provide diverse formats, programs and content. This is akin to arguing that McDonald's has an incentive to offer a diverse menu because of its market share. McDonald's might have an incentive to add a new product to its menu, but that product must still adhere to certain limitations that will exist because it is being made by McDonalds. These limits arise because of physical and functional restrictions, target audience restrictions, profitability limits, etc.

I would suggest that the FCC focus its attention on restricting the market share of the most powerful media outlets. Certainly, it makes no sense to compare a public access cable channel, with its paucity of funding, lack of advertising money, and often limited audience, with the likes of ABC or the Washington Post.